



Next Generation

► Postcard from an NJAA director and state spotlights

Enjoy the journey

From the time we start kindergarten, we have goals set for us — goals to begin reading, learning to share and so many more that are going to benefit us for life. Early on, our parents, families, teachers, peers and we,



Mercedes Danekas

ourselves, establish these goals to a certain extent.

I know that my goals through elementary school were simple. My job was to work hard on my schoolwork, achieve good grades, do my chores at home and work at

not talking in class. Not talking in class was the toughest. It just came so naturally. I did eventually learn to curb myself and develop ways to focus that energy into something the teachers appreciated.

When I reached the age of nine and began showing cattle, I added a whole new set of goals to my life. Those first years, the goals weren't centered on the competitive aspects of the showing, they were based on learning the ropes — hanging on to that heifer that didn't want to be in the showing, learning how to grin and bear it when my

heifer set her hoof down squarely on my toes and, perhaps most importantly, learning the rudiments of sportsmanship.

It was learning to use the blower, conquering my fears of those heifers with attitudes, being able to master hanging on to the halter and show stick all at one time and smiling when I closed the gate at the show. Those were a lot of goals for a 10-year-old, and many times I felt like they might never be mastered. I was fortunate though. I not only had my parents, but also many mentors who helped me achieve my goals and made the journey in reaching them a special and memorable one. They were the reason I developed the love I have today for the Angus business.

Goals are the things that help us stay centered in life and keep us reaching and stretching to improve ourselves. What is really important beyond setting goals and reaching them is learning from the journey that takes you to that ultimate end. It is in the journey, in all of its aspects, both good and bad, that we truly learn about the world and ourselves.

High school

When I reached high school I had so many goals for myself that sometimes it was

overwhelming. I see this happening to a lot of young people today. My goals to maintain a high grade-point average, stay on my high school varsity softball team, reach goals with my cattle, participate in more junior Angus activities, prepare for the SATs, and stay involved with student government became more than just goals. They became burdens.

It took a series of several dramatic events for me to realize that I needed to realign the goals that were crushing me and to realize that, in rushing to achieve one goal after another, I was missing the most important thing — the journey.

One of the first events to unfold was an accident on the softball field in which I dislocated a knee. The first time it happened, I worked at coming back and staying on top of my game. By the time it happened four times and surgery was required, I had some tough choices to face. The doctors weren't offering a prognosis that looked very promising for a college softball career.

I was discouraged and sad that something I loved was going to be removed from my life. It was time to re-examine my goals and acknowledge the changes I would need to make. I decided to dedicate the time I had spent in sports to my cattle and becoming more involved with the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA).

It was at that time that I decided at the end of my sophomore year to switch from my small Catholic girls' high school of 375 to the public high school that had more than 1,100 students, in a new town to which we were moving. My reason for transferring was to have the opportunity to participate in the FFA program that was offered.

This would prove to be a most challenging and meaningful journey. I went from a school where I knew everyone's name to become a student known by an assigned ID number. This journey truly forced me out of my comfort zone. I had to learn to make new friends, accept new ways and constantly grow.

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Family perspective

It was just as I was learning to travel the road of this new journey that the most dramatic event of my life was about to take place. My busy, energetic, always on-the-go dad began to experience heart problems. The situation was very serious and required immediate surgery.

That day my goals and my journey changed again. I had taken for granted that my father would always be there. All of a sudden, the reality of what was happening and the possible consequences once again had me examining the importance of my goals and the new ones I now needed to set to help my family in this new set of circumstances.

My new goals became less concrete; yes, I still had my college goal, but it didn't have to be one particular college. Yes, I still wanted to make good grades, and I still had goals for my cattle. The most important ones were learning to enjoy the journey with my family each and every day, learning to appreciate the moments and keeping my goals in perspective.

It is the journey you take to your goals, whether you achieve them or not, that you need to cherish. The journey is not always smooth, but most often it is the bumps in the road that you'll remember most and treasure. Enjoy your journey.

— Mercedes Danekas, Wilton, Calif.

Illinois

The LaSalle County 4-H livestock judging team earned sixth-place honors at the national contest conducted in conjunction with the American Royal in Kansas City, Mo. Junior Angus member **Megan Quaka**, Mazon, was the top individual in the competition, placing first in oral reasons, second in beef and seventh in hogs. Team members in addition to Quaka include Casey Schnitz, Leland; and Chad Shute and Dan Duffield, both of Grand Ridge. The team was coached by Mike Prescott, Mendota.

North Dakota



► **Clyde Dukart** (second from right), Dickinson, donated this heifer to the North Dakota Select Sale, with proceeds from the sale going to the North Dakota Junior Angus Association Foundation. **David Petry** (right), Minot, purchased the heifer.

Indiana



► Officers and directors of the Indiana Junior Angus Ass'n are (seated, from left) **Kara Claeys**, Chalmers, president; **Chad Haag**, Plymouth, first vice president; **Jon Leeper**, Argos, second vice president; **Kristi Wilson**, Orleans, third vice president; (standing, from left) **Christina Harp**, Crawfordsville, secretary; **Paige Sherman**, Laconia, treasurer; **Kara Wilson**, Orleans, reporter; **Katie Barker**, Avon, communications director; and **Lucas Neumayr**, New Richmond, adult board representative.



► Indiana Angus royalty include (from left) **Kristi Wilson**, Orleans, past Indiana Angus queen; **Annette Lamb**, Milford, 2002 Indiana Angus queen; and **Katie Barker**, Avon, 2002 Indiana Angus princess.



Junior deadlines for Atlantic National

The ownership and entry deadline for the Atlantic National Junior Angus Show is April 15. Even though the event is a regional preview show for junior members, the Atlantic National show management handles the entry process. For information or to request entry forms, contact Bobbi McMullen at (717) 548-3282 or bobbi@epix.net.

Association can help with junior transfers

If you know a junior member who has purchased a heifer to show and has not received the transfer papers, and if the ownership deadline for a specific show is approaching, help is available. Contact the Association at least two weeks prior to the show's ownership deadline. Every effort will be made to get the transfer processed in time. Remember, however, late transfers are never accepted, regardless of the reason.